

## Reading: Reactions to Change

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### Common Reactions to Change

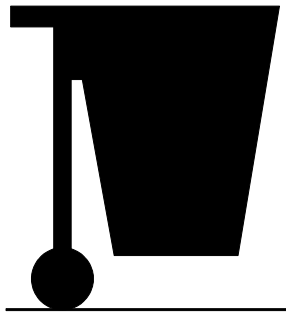
People display a wide range of emotions when dealing with change. Some common signs of difficulty dealing with change include:

Impatience	Irritability
Edginess	Tears
Sulkiness	Short attention span
Angry outbursts	Forgetfulness
Inattentiveness	Illness
Self-absorption	Withdrawal

These reactions are normal, as long as they are not permanent. Leaders may find that they, too, are showing signs of strain.

### Exercise: The Newly-Designed Wheelbarrow

Try this exercise. Pictured below is a newly designed wheelbarrow. Using words and brief phrases, write at least five reactions to the wheelbarrow.



Now review your list, and put a “+” (plus sign) next to all the positive comments you wrote, a “-” (minus sign) next to the negative comments, and a “0” (zero) next to the neutral comments.

Take a look at the results. Did you have mostly negative comments? Remember, you were asked to write down your reactions, not necessarily criticisms.

Our natural tendency when faced with a change is to become critical, especially when we don’t understand the reason for the change – for example, Why do we need a new wheelbarrow? What problem are we trying to solve with it?

Also, as we get older, we tend to lose sight of the possibilities. Consider what children have said about the new wheelbarrow:

“That’s a very interesting wheelbarrow. Because the handle is so short, if you got some mud on the wheel, you could reach right over and kick it off.”

“Hey, that’s a neat wheelbarrow. You could wheel that right up to the edge of a hole and empty it over the edge.”

“Yeah, and that design gives you the opportunity to put a little trap door in the bottom of the hopper and empty it easily by just pulling on a string.”

### **Why People React**

When an organization does not address the emotional needs of its employees during change, the productivity and success of the organization suffer. Michael Beer of Harvard states that the three ingredients for successful organizations are:

- **Competence** – Each individual's mastery of their job
- **Coordination** – Collaboration within the organization
- **Commitment** – To the goals and values of the organization

During change, all of these are threatened. Employees may be put into jobs where they do not have the necessary skills to succeed. Traditional networks for collaboration break down. Employees' commitment declines in the face of real or perceived threats to their jobs, identity, or competence.

### **Questions About Change**

People need the answers to these questions about change:

- Why is this change necessary?
- Who is in charge of making it happen?
- How will the work be done differently?
- Will I have input into the change?
- How will it effect me personally? Will I lose anything? Gain anything?
- What help will I be given to deal with the change?
- What about my colleagues – what will happen to them? Will they lose or gain anything?
- What help will others be given to deal with the change?
- What will happen to my organization?
- How will the change affect the whole organization?
- How will the outside world react to the change?
- How can I help make the change successful?

## Potential Losses

Some things people often see as potential losses:

<b>Tangible losses</b>	<b>Intangible losses</b>
The job itself	Independence, power, control
Title or status	Visibility, potential for promotion
Pay and benefits	Respect
Overtime	"Down time" or "time to think"
Comfortable office space	Sense of contribution
Short/easy/familiar commute	Relationships with people

## Patterns of Accepting Change

It may be helpful to think about people's acceptance of change in terms of the following characteristics:

- **Trailblazers** . . . Who embrace the concept; they have been doing it all along. They don't need much help.
- **Pilots** . . . Who know how to get somewhere, but need to know where to go. They are somewhat cautious but are readily won over once they know the vision and their role.
- **Intellectuals** . . . Who believe they support the concept and say the right things, but they don't walk the talk. They must strongly feel the need to change their behavior before they'll do anything differently.
- **Late Bloomers** . . . Who resist for a long time, then change. They must strongly feel the need to change and be convinced that this is a better way. They can turn into strong supporters of the change (for example, ex-smokers are often strong advocates for no-smoking policies).
- **Traditionalists** . . . Who won't be won over. They feel the concept is flawed. They need to be given other options or be allowed to leave as gracefully as possible.